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ABSTRACT

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's Talent Development High School comprehensive reform model addresses low student achievement and poor school climate, blending a common core academic curriculum with career themes in the upper grades. It includes a separate Ninth Grade Success Academy with interdisciplinary teacher teams, ninth and tenth grade Career Academies, special courses addressing weaknesses in ninth and tenth graders' preparation levels, block scheduling, extra help and recovery opportunities for struggling students, and intensive subject-specific teacher professional development. Research showed substantial improvements in school climate and students' academic gains in the 1999-2000 school year. In the 2000-01 academic year, first-time freshmen at Talent Development schools were more likely to have passed all required courses than control freshmen. By the end of 2001, these same students were more likely to be in school and in tenth grade if they attended Talent Development schools. The proportion of upper-grades students grew since implementation of the Talent Development program. Talent Development students showed greater gains in reading and mathematics from eighth to ninth grade than control students. Students had high levels of satisfaction with their Talent Development experience. Teachers liked being part of a team, receiving a curriculum for certain key courses, and teaching in longer class periods. (SM)

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PHILADELPHIA'S TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOLS: SECOND-YEAR RESULTS, 2000-01

Elizabeth Useem, Ruth Curran Neild, and William Morrison

Philadelphia Education Fund

2002

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Philadelphia's Talent Development High Schools: Second-year Results 2000-01

Students attending most of Philadelphia's neighborhood high schools have only a 40-50 percent chance of graduating in four years. The number of ninth graders is usually more than double the number of 12th graders, demonstrating the very weak "promoting power" of these institutions. These schools face significant challenges since the overwhelming majority of their ninth graders are repeating the grade, in special education, and/or have reading and math skills more than two grades below grade level. Students entering such schools as ninth graders read, on average, at only a fifth grade level.

The Talent Development High School comprehensive reform model was developed at Johns Hopkins University to address the problems of low student achievement and poor school climate faced by these schools. The Philadelphia Education Fund is the regional partner for Talent Development.

The initiative, which eliminates "general" curriculum courses, blends a common core academic curriculum with career themes in the upper grades. The model's chief components include:

- A separate Ninth Grade Success Academy organized around interdisciplinary teams of teachers aimed at creating an atmosphere for students that combines academic rigor with personal nurture.

- Career Academies for the 10th-12th grade students, divided into smaller instructional teams serving 130-150 students.

- Specifically designed courses for the ninth and tenth grades to address weaknesses in preparation levels: Strategic Reading, Freshman Seminar and Introduction to Advanced Mathematics for all ninth graders; and Transition to Geometry, and Reading and Writing in Your Career for tenth graders who need it.

- "Block scheduling" whereby students take only four courses a semester, each 85-95 minutes long.

- An array of extra-help and recovery opportunities for students who are struggling, including an alternative after-hours Twilight School.

- Intensive subject-specific professional development for teachers, including the support of curriculum coaches who work with teachers in their classrooms. Principals have the assistance of an organizational facilitator who is in the school almost every day supporting the reform.

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First-year Evidence of Impact

A report published last year summarized results of first-year reform implementation at Strawberry Mansion and Edison High Schools during 1999-00.

Data showed substantial improvements in school climate.

	98-99	99-00
Significant drops in arrests		
Mansion	62	16
Edison	125	21
Significant drops in suspensions		
Mansion	125	37
Edison	1049	788
Increases in attendance		
Mansion	73%	77%
Edison	66%	71%

From School District of Philadelphia reports

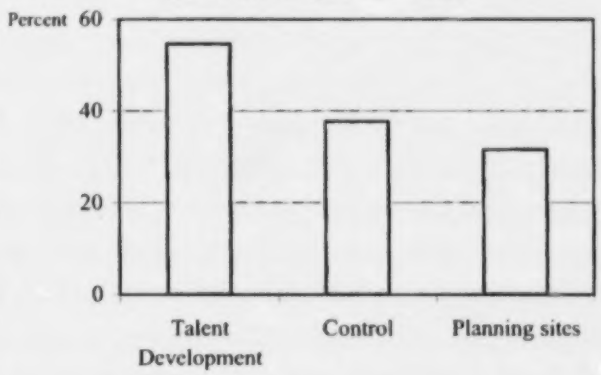
Students' academic gains were equally impressive

- The percentage of students passing all of their core courses jumped from 24 percent to 56 percent overall at the two schools.
- Promotion to 10th grade grew by 47 percent at Mansion and by 65 percent at Edison.
- Standardized test scores went up in math with a respectable overall gain of 3.5 normal curve equivalents (NCEs).
- Standardized reading scores showed a small decrease while control schools showed a significant decline.
- Students and teachers praised the changes they saw in the schools.

Second-year Evidence of Impact

New guidelines for promotion from 9th to 10th grade specify that students must earn credits in English, science, and Algebra 1. During 2000-01, first-time freshmen at Talent Development schools were more likely to have passed all of these courses than those at demographically similar control schools and at two schools that were in their planning year for Talent Development. Even without summer school credits counted in, more than 50% of the freshmen at Talent Development high schools had passed these courses, in comparison to 35% of the students at control schools and 30% at the planning sites.

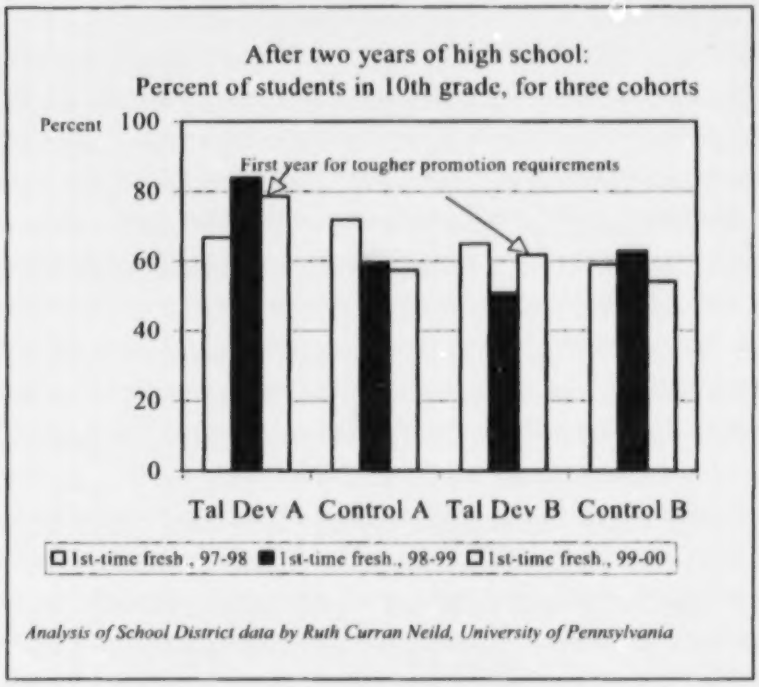
Percent passing Algebra 1, English, and Science,
for those taking all three courses*



Analysis of School District report card files by Ruth Curran Neild, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania

*Does not include summer school data

Where were the first-time freshmen two years after they started high school? By June 2001 (the end of the 2nd year of implementation), those freshmen were more likely to be in school and in the 10th grade if they attended a Talent Development school.



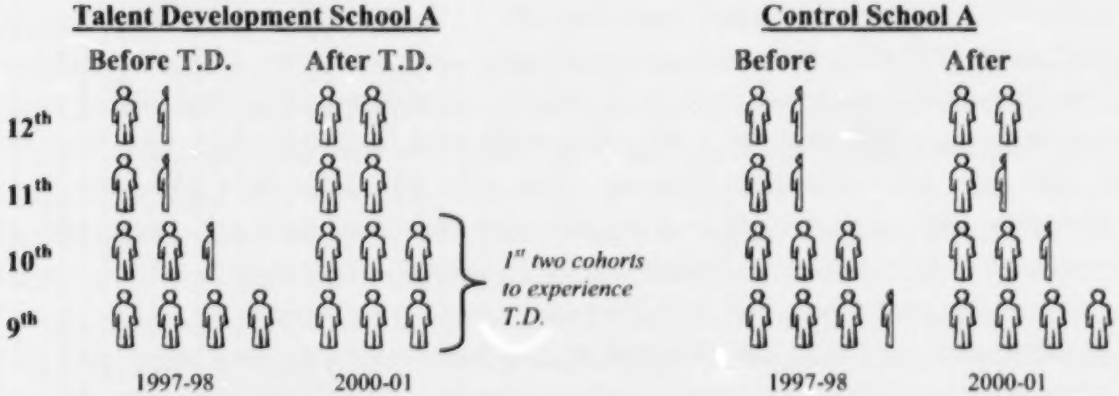
Analysis of School District data by Ruth Curran Neild, University of Pennsylvania

- Almost 80% of students who began 9th grade at Talent Development School A (and who had not transferred to another school) were in the 10th grade two years later. These students were almost as likely to be promoted as the previous cohort, despite a new promotion policy requiring 5 credits, including one each in English, science, and Algebra.* In contrast, Control School A showed a substantial decline over three years.

- Despite the more challenging promotion guidelines, Talent Development School B showed a sizeable rebound in the percent of students enrolled and in 10th grade at the end of 2 years. Control School B, in contrast, showed a decline.

Changing the grade level distribution

Since the implementation of the Talent Development program, the proportion of students in the upper grades has grown. In contrast, the control school continues to have approximately twice as many freshmen as seniors. Talent Development A is the school with the most extensive implementation of the model.



Analysis of School District data by Ruth Curran Neild, University of Pennsylvania

*The previous cohort had been required to earn only four credits in any subject area. These students also benefited from a special program for 9th grade repeaters that allowed them to earn enough credits for mid-year promotion to 10th grade. Students who dropped out of school or whose whereabouts were unknown *are included* in the denominator.

PSSA Scores

A stepped-up focus by the state and School District on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests make improvement on these 11th grade tests very important for schools in Philadelphia. Scores from last year's 11th graders at the two schools appear in the box at right.

2000-2001 PSSA Scores—11th Grade

Math	99-00	00-01	Participation Rate, 00-01
Mansion	1020	1060	91.3%
Edison	1060	1070	80.8%
Reading	99-00	00-01	Participation Rate, 00-01
Mansion	990	1030	87.8%
Edison	1010	1040	70.2%

Source: PA Dept. of Education

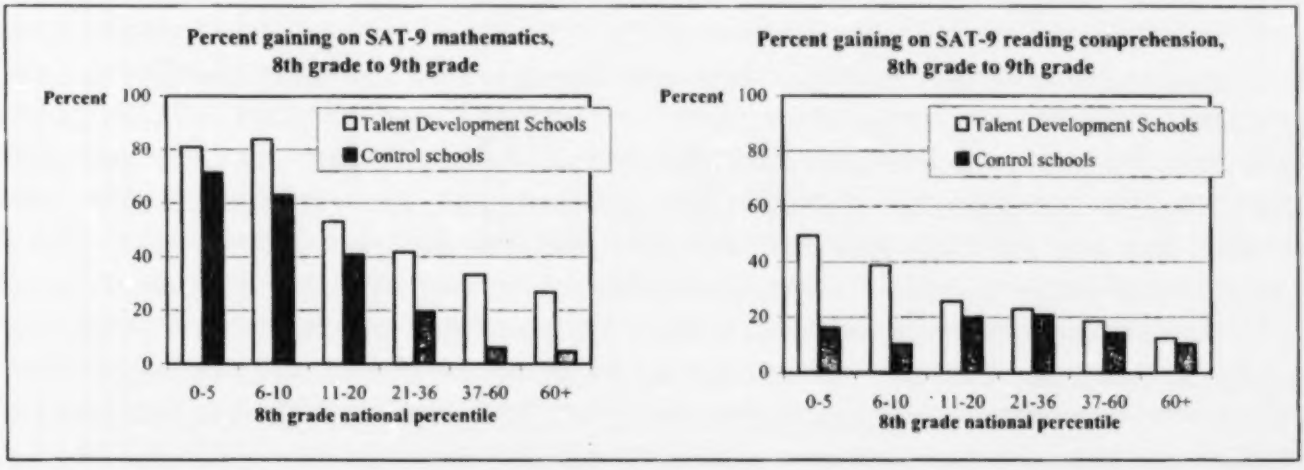
The first Talent Development cohort at Mansion and Edison has just entered the 11th grade in September 2001. This means that the students who took the PSSA in spring 2001 had never been in a Ninth Grade Academy. Nevertheless, scores improved at both schools between 1999-00 and 2000-01.

One factor that might limit future gains is the increase in the number of 11th grade students due to lower rates of dropout from 9th to 11th grade. PSSA scores will be followed closely by Talent Development researchers when 2002 scores become available.

SAT-9 Results

Compared to students at demographically similar control schools, Talent Development High School students showed greater gains in reading and math from the end of 8th grade to the end of 9th grade

The data indicate that students at Talent Development schools were more likely than control schools and Talent Development planning sites to experience NCE gains in mathematics across the achievement spectrum. For students in the 6th to 10th percentile nationally (a large percentage of the students at the schools), the difference in the percent experiencing any gains was substantial. A smaller percent experienced any gains in reading at all of the schools. At Talent Development schools, however, **students with the weakest reading skills were considerably more likely to show gains.**



First-year Results from Simon Gratz High School

Promising results were achieved at the new 9th Grade Academy at the third implementation site, Simon Gratz High School, a high-poverty school with 2000 students in North Philadelphia. After just one year of implementation, attendance soared, course failures dropped, and the promotion rate to tenth grade rose significantly. **The size of the 10th grade rose from 424 students in the fall of 2000 to 613 students in the fall of 2001.**

Data for Simon Gratz H.S.

	99-00	00-01
Attendance	58.1%	70.2% *(79.5% for new Freshmen)*
% with 90% attendance or better	8.3%	24% *(32.1% of new Freshmen)*
% suspended	48.8%	33.4%
% passing algebra, English & science in 9th grade *(excludes summer school)*	38.9%	54.3%

Source: School District reports and analysis of district data by Ruth Curran Neild, University of Pennsylvania

Implementation Status

1998-99
- Planning year at Edison and Mansion

1999-00
- 9th Grade Academy starts at Edison and Mansion
- Planning Year Simon Gratz

2000-01
- Expansion to upper grades teams at Mansion
- 9th Grade Academy starts at Simon Gratz
- Planning year at Germantown and Franklin

2001-02
- New 10th grade courses and coaching at Mansion
- Strengthened coaching at all five schools
- Planning for upper grades expansion at Edison and Gratz
- First year whole-school implementation starts at Germantown
- 9th Grade Academy starts at Benjamin Franklin

What Students Say about Talent Development

Students reported high levels of satisfaction with their school experience. Continuing a study conducted during the first year of the program's implementation, researchers Bruce Wilson and Dick Corbett interviewed 185 students at Mansion, Edison, and Gratz near the end of the 2000-2001 school year to document their assessment of the model's impact.

Students identified core elements of the Talent Development model as making significant contributions to their positive reactions. For example, teacher-student relationships benefited tremendously from the extended class periods. Students noted that their teachers "take the time to listen to what we have to say," "help us whenever we need it," "make sure we know how to do the work," and "take the time to explain until we understand." They added that they had teachers who "care about us" and "want us to learn."

"Middle school was easy. Here it's hard, but I get it because the teachers explain it."
Ninth grade student

Two-thirds of the students said that the physical separation of the ninth grade was a good idea. They felt that the separation from older students and the closer proximity of their classes made them less inclined to misbehave.

Three-fourths of the students praised the Freshman Seminar. For some, the class got them thinking about possible careers; others felt that they developed study skills and work habits, especially note taking, that would be needed in the coming years; and still others enjoyed the chance to have whole-class discussions on school-related matters.

Students described an orderly school year. Students also said their coursework was challenging, meaning that the material did not repeat what they had learned in earlier grades and that they had more work to do than in the past.

"My teachers make sure that we work hard. They get together and talk about us."
Ninth grade student

Fewer ninth grade students than in the previous year said that they had found their respective schools to be different from what they had been told they would be. This is important because previous students reported that they were pleasantly surprised that their high schools were not the rowdy, impersonal, and disruptive places their reputations suggested they would be. More students in this year's cohort, however, were beginning to say that they had heard that their high-schools-to-be were good schools. They concurred that, in fact, 'This is a good school.'

"For the students we interviewed, school and classroom life had become predictable. Lessons started on time, and there was time to complete them during the class period. Stragglers to rooms were few, and those who struggled in class knew that help was likely to be immediately available. The hallways were safe, students were calm, and staff members were visibly present throughout class changes."

From report of independent evaluators, Dickson Corbett and Bruce Wilson (November 2001)

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Teachers' Appraisals of the Model

During 2000-2001, evaluators from an independent firm, Research for Action, interviewed 34 people, mainly teachers but including administrators as well, at Mansion and Edison high schools. They also conducted a focus group with ninth grade teachers at Gratz High School. As was the case the year before, teachers were positive but less effusive than their students in expressing support for the Talent Development model.

Teachers particularly liked:

- **Being part of a team of teachers**. The teams with the most stable memberships were also the teams that exuded the most confidence and conviviality. The Ninth Grade Academy teams met weekly and shared their experience and knowledge of their students with one another.

- **Being provided with a curriculum for certain key courses.** They thought the courses developed for the model were appropriate for ninth graders and were flexible enough to adjust to their own teaching styles and their students' needs.

- **Teaching the longer class periods**. Block periods limited the number of classes students had, and this helped teachers come to know them better. Blocks also reduced the amount of unstructured time between classes, contributing to a more orderly and classroom-centered school environment.

Teachers expressed several concerns. They reported little time devoted to instructional issues at team meetings and few chances to meet with teachers in their same content area. They noted weak communication among teams within the Ninth Grade Academy. Teachers bemoaned the delayed opening of the Twilight School in one school (due to budget cuts).

Teachers said the long block periods did not really double the amount of material covered but instead allowed them to teach about the same amount of material (perhaps a little more) but with greater depth.

Faculty also reported varying levels of assistance from curriculum coaches. Ninth grade teachers at Gratz High School (in its first year) and new ninth grade teachers at Mansion and Edison reported comparatively high support while some of the veterans reported little. Monthly professional development sessions and summer workshops were reasonably well attended.

Twilight School

The Twilight School for students in grades 9-12, a key component of the Talent Development model, is a late-afternoon alternative program for students with serious personal and academic problems. During 2000-2001, 500+ students attended the Twilight programs at TD high schools. A study by Bruce Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett of Twilight students at Edison concluded that older students were nearly unanimous in their praise for the program while younger students were more conflicted about their placement in the program and its benefits for them.

About This Report ...

This report represents the work of four research groups during the 2000-2001 school year:

- **Collection and analysis of data on student outcomes:** Dr. Ruth Curran Neild, Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and consultant to the CRESPAR Center at Johns Hopkins University, and William Morrison, Director of the Philadelphia Talent Development initiative for Johns Hopkins University on assignment to the Philadelphia Education Fund;

- **Retrieval and compilation of data on student grades and promotion rates:** Loretta Westler, Office of Accountability and Assessment of the School District of Philadelphia;

- **Evaluation of teachers' appraisals of the Talent Development effort:** Dr. Matthew Goldwasser and Hitomi Yoshida, Research for Action, an independent evaluation firm;

- **Evaluation of students' assessment of the Talent Development initiative:** Dr. Dickson Corbett and Dr. Bruce Wilson, independent researchers.

This synthesis of write-ups from the evaluation reports was put together by Dr. Elizabeth Useem, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Philadelphia Education Fund, Dr. Ruth Curran Neild, and William Morrison. Funding for the evaluations by Research for Action and Corbett/Wilson, along with the writing and printing of this report, was provided by a grant to the Philadelphia Education Fund from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The work of Dr. Neild and Mr. Morrison was supported at Johns Hopkins University by a grant (R-117-D940005) from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education.

The Philadelphia Education Fund is an independent non-profit local education fund and is a member of the Public Education Network (PEN) in Washington, D.C. The Fund is the regional partner for the Talent Development effort in the Philadelphia area.

Talent Development High Schools

Research and Development Sites

Edison-Fareira High School
Principal: Dr. Jose Lebrón
Success Academy Principal: Ken Lerner
215-324-9440

Strawberry Mansion Middle/High School
Principal: Lois Mondesire
Success Academy Principal:
Marshall Album
215-684-5089

Simon Gratz High School
Principal: Hildebrand Pelzer III
215-227-4408

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